

California Deer Hunters Asked to Assist with Chronic Wasting Disease Monitoring Program

by Dr. Pam Swift

For the past two years, California hunters have been asked to take extraordinary steps to help prevent the spread of Chronic Wasting Disease to the state's deer herds. While out-of-state hunters comply with strict regulations on the importation of deer and elk carcasses, wildlife managers continue to monitor California deer herds. So far, so good; no CWD has been detected in California.

Nevertheless, the DFG will continue its diligence by sampling hundreds of deer again this year. For the first time, up to 600 hunters will be able to assist with the monitoring program while at the same time getting their harvested deer tested free of charge. Here's how the program will work:

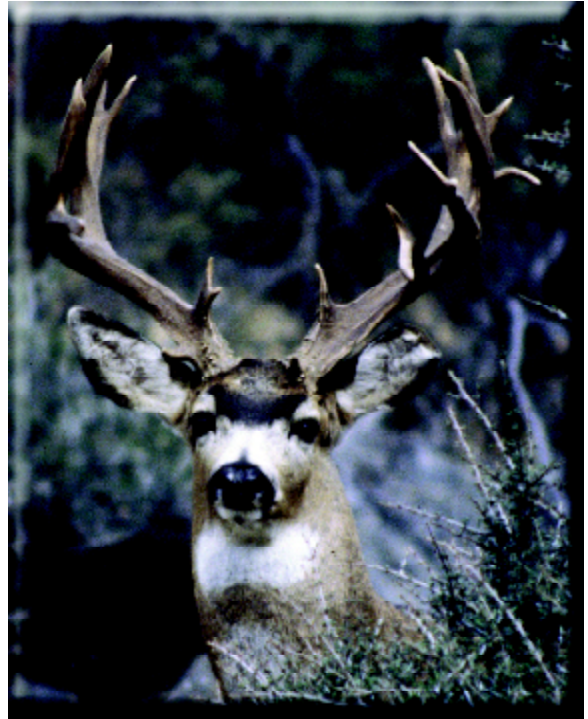
This fall the DFG intends to sample hunter-harvested deer only from Northern California. The collection of heads or tissue samples will take place at staffed check stations that will be set up at various, convenient locations throughout the sampling area during the opening weekend for the different hunt zones. DFG will test the first 600 deer submitted for sampling this next hunt season free of charge. Hunter participation is voluntary and strongly encouraged. Collections may also occur at cooperating wild game processors in the northern California area.

CWD is a neurological, debilitating disease that belongs to a family of diseases known as Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSEs), and is believed to be caused by an abnormal protein called a prion. CWD attacks the brains of infected

animals, causing them to become emaciated, display abnormal behavior, and lose bodily functions. It is unknown how the disease is transmitted. CWD is incurable, untreatable and fatal. Clinical signs include excessive salivation and grinding of teeth, increased drinking and urination, dramatic loss of weight and body condition, poor hair coat, staggering, and finally death. Behavioral changes, including decreased interaction with other animals, listlessness, lowering of the head, blank facial expression, and repetitive walking in set patterns, also may occur.

CWD has been diagnosed in mule deer, white-tailed deer, and Rocky Mountain elk in captive herds and in the wild in 11 states (Colorado, Illinois, Kansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Utah, Wisconsin, and Wyoming). Other cervids (antlered animals) may also be susceptible. California is considered a "low risk" state for CWD since the ranching of cervids (except for fallow deer) is not allowed, and the importation of elk was banned in the early 1980s.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), there is no evidence that CWD will cross species barriers to infect humans. However, hunters are advised not to eat meat from any animal that appears sick.



DFG will be collecting samples only from deer harvested in the following hunt zones: A (northern portion) B1, B2, B3, B4, B5, B6, C1, C2, C3, C4, D3, D4, X1, X2, X3(a&b), X4, X5 (a&b), X6 (a&b), and X7 (a&b). To locate a sampling check station within or near your hunt zone, please check the DFG website after June 15, 2004 at <http://www.dfg.ca.gov/hunting/deer/wasting.html>.

Since the DFG started its surveillance program in 1999, more than 1,307 tissue specimens from free-ranging deer and elk have been collected and tested for CWD. To date, all specimens have tested negative for CWD.

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